DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 444 372 FL 026 364

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TITLE Learning To Teach Foreign Languages: Case Studies of Six Preservice Teachers.

PUB DATE 2000-04-25

NOTE 41p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, April 24-28, 2000).

PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnography; *Field Experience Programs; Graduate Students; Higher Education; Interviews; *Language Teachers; *Preservice Teacher Education; Questionnaires; Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; Teacher Educator Education; Teacher Improvement; *Teaching Methods; *Theory Practice Relationship

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate six preservice teachers' understandings of the theory and practice of teaching and learning foreign languages during their course work and field experiences in a teacher education program. The participants in the study were full-time students in a year-long graduate-level program. This paper focuses on the participants' understandings of how to teach in a particular classroom context. Ethnographic techniques, including observations, interviews, and document analyses, were used. In discussions of how to teach a foreign language, the participants outlined the need for teachers to provide a language-rich environment in which students are guided to use the foreign language to express themselves and obtain information from others. Methods courses supported these ideas. However, during the participants' field experiences, contextual constraints entered into the equation, and many opted to abandon these practices when they encountered a negative reaction from their students and mentors. Although teacher educators have an opportunity to ground preservice teachers in the theory and practice of foreign language education in methods courses, they should recognize that corresponding field experiences seldom represent idealized language learning situations. Despite a base of foreign language pedagogical content knowledge, what preservice teachers really need is continued support in order to learn to adapt their teaching methods to whatever circumstances they encounter. (Contains 33 references.) (KFT)

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ED 444 372

Learning to Teach Foreign Languages:

Case Studies of Six Preservice Teachers

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA. Session 10.09, Constructing Preservice Teacher Knowledge: What Parts Research, Practice, Theory and/or Emotions?, April 25, 2000.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate six preservice teachers' understandings of the theory and practice of teaching and learning foreign languages during their course work and field experiences in a teacher education program. The participants in the study were full-time students in a one-year, graduate-level program. The present paper, which is part of a larger study on the development of foreign language pedagogical content knowledge, focuses on the participants' understandings of how to teach in a particular classroom context. Ethnographic techniques, including observations, interviews, and document analyses, were used.

In discussions of how to teach a foreign language, the participants outlined the need for teachers to provide a language-rich environment in which students are guided to use the foreign language to express their own meanings and to gain information from others and from authentic texts. According to the participants, their methods courses supported these ideas. However, the participants identified conflicts between the idealized perspective presented in methods courses and the contextual constraints encountered in their field placements. Despite stated commitments to particular theories or practices, the participants might abandon them if they perceived a negative reaction from students or mentors. Although teacher educators have an opportunity to ground preservice teachers in the theory and practice of foreign language education in methods courses, they should recognize that corresponding field experiences seldom represent idealized language learning situations. Despite a base of foreign language pedagogical content knowledge, preservice teachers need continued support in order to deepen their understandings of how to implement their knowledge with specific groups of learners.

Introduction

A common perception of educators and non-educators alike is that teacher education programs provide preservice teachers with theoretical knowledge while classroom experiences offer them practical knowledge. It has been the responsibility of preservice teachers to integrate and implement their knowledge in the classroom (Eisenhart, Behm, & Romagnano, 1991; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998). In the last decade, however, reform efforts have attempted to eliminate this notion of a dichotomy between theory and practice. Reports including those of the Carnegie Forum (1986) and the Holmes Group (1986) have called for stronger associations between university programs and schools in order to assist preservice teachers in a university program to "relate theory to practice in actual schools" (Lange, 1990, p. 246).

The call for teacher education programs that address the fragmentation of university course work and practice teaching in traditional programs culminated in the report of the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (1996). In its recommendations for the improvement of teacher preparation, the commission advocated the extension of programs beyond the traditional, four-year, undergraduate degree. Preservice teachers would spend an additional year, either at the undergraduate or graduate level, focusing on their professional education and completing a year-long internship at a professional development school. The commission suggested that preservice teachers would achieve a deeper understanding of the theoretical bases of teaching and their practical applications through university courses and internships.

Despite the confidence of educational reformers and teacher educators in the power of more cohesive teacher education programs to enhance the theoretical and practical understandings of preservice teachers, the research to support the rhetoric seems thin. Although foreign language teacher educators have published descriptive accounts of reform efforts in their programs (e.g., Garfinkel & Sosa, 1996; Robinson, Schmidt-Rinehart, & Knight, 1997), there is limited research on the experiences of the preservice teachers enrolled in those programs. In their review of the previous ten years of research on foreign language teacher education, Bernhardt and Hammadou (1987) found that only eight of 78 articles in their data base were reports of research. In a brief review of the research since 1987, Hammadou (1993) found only seven new research studies in the ERIC data base. Although there have not been major changes in the research base since Hammadou's report, Freeman and Richards' (1996) volume of research-based accounts of second language teacher education suggests a growing interest in this area of research.

In increasingly more teacher education programs, preservice teachers begin their professional education following undergraduate programs in which they specialize in a given content area, such as a foreign language. Thus, it is through teacher education programs that preservice foreign language teachers are expected to gain pedagogical content knowledge or their understandings of the "ways of representing and formulating the subject that makes it comprehensible to others" (Shulman, 1986, p. 9). Through methods course work and field experiences, preservice teachers are expected to develop an understanding of the theoretical bases of current practices in teaching languages. This study was an effort to address the gap in the research on the experiences of preservice foreign language teachers in a teacher education program by investigating the

connections they made between the theory and techniques learned in university methods courses and the application of those theories and techniques in their field experience placements while still in the teacher education program.

The theoretical construct chosen to frame this notion of a growing understanding of the theoretical bases and practical concerns in teaching languages was Shulman's notion of pedagogical content knowledge. Pedagogical content knowledge lies at the intersection of content and pedagogy. It is "the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented in instruction" (Shulman, 1987, p. 8). In foreign language teacher education, Wing (1993) defined the concept of pedagogical content knowledge as understanding what it means to know a foreign language, how learners learn a foreign language, what should be taught in a foreign language class, how the foreign language should be taught, and how classroom contexts affect language instruction. The present paper, which is part of a larger study of the development of foreign language pedagogical content knowledge, focuses on preservice teachers' understandings of how to teach in a particular classroom context.

It is crucial, however, that teacher educators recognize that preservice language teachers do not come to their programs as blank slates. As Freeman (1991, 1993) and Johnson (1994) found, preservice teachers have expectations and beliefs about what it means to be a foreign language teacher and a foreign language learner, based on their own experiences as language learners in formal and informal language learning situations. These language learning experiences, which may have been positive or

negative, influence the preservice teachers' images of the teachers they want to be or do not want to be.

The purpose of this study, then, was to investigate six preservice teachers' understandings of the theory and practice of teaching and learning foreign languages during their course work and field experiences in a graduate-level teacher education program. The participants in the study were full-time students in a one-year, graduate-level teacher preparation program. They had completed a major or minor in a foreign language prior to the graduate program.

The Study of Preservice Language Teachers

Through foreign language methods courses, preservice language teachers may acquire their most significant understandings of the theoretical bases and practical knowledge of language teaching. Unfortunately, there have been few studies of foreign language methods courses. Grosse (1993) offered an initial step in addressing this gap in the knowledge of teacher educators in her survey of the content of foreign language methods courses. Her analysis of 157 course syllabi suggested that methods instructors endeavored to offer a balance of theoretical and practical information. Instructors provided discussion of the theoretical bases of current practices as well as opportunities for preservice teachers to experiment with some of those practices.

Descriptive reports of specific methods courses also suggest that methods instructors strive to provide a grounding in the theoretical bases of the field and opportunities for practice during methods courses (Garfinkel & Sosa, 1996; Mitchell & Redmond, 1991; Wilburn, 1990). Garfinkel and Sosa (1996) outlined the most substantial changes made to the content of a methods course as a result of the teacher reform movement. The

faculty at Purdue University and at Jefferson High School, a local school, contracted to form a Professional Development School. The methods course changed in dramatic fashion from a traditional, semester course to an abbreviated university-based course with a more extensive field experience component.

The literature on foreign language methods courses, albeit limited, suggests that teacher educators try to provide preservice teachers with opportunities to acquire the theoretical bases of teaching and learning and the practical implications for the classroom. Nevertheless, the literature reveals a limited investigation of the meanings that preservice teachers make from their experiences. As Joiner (1993) noted, "While program design is important, a good design in and of itself, does not automatically guarantee the goals the designers wish to achieve" (p. 200). The sense that preservice teachers make of their teacher education experiences may be the ultimate test of methods instruction.

Some researchers have studied the responses of preservice teachers to specific curricula or curricular changes in methods course work. Given the inherent complexity of studying individuals in an educational context, the researchers employed qualitative techniques in order to investigate the transition from the role of language learner to the role of language teacher.

Freeman (1991, 1993) explored the perceptions and understandings of foreign language teachers gained during a teacher education program. Although the participants in his study were inservice teachers, their limited experience in formal, graduate-level, teacher education seems comparable to that of preservice teachers. Freeman (1993) found that the methodology courses gave the research participants a professional

discourse that allowed them to think and act in different ways. For example, one teacher came to the conclusion that a student's difficulty in reading a poem revealed the complexity of second language reading comprehension rather than a breakdown in classroom management. Freeman (1991, 1993) argued that the teachers did not simply rename their experiences by means of a newly-acquired professional discourse. He suggested that the discourse gained in their program enabled the teachers to make explicit their tacit beliefs and to reconstruct their experiences in the classroom.

The literature on the experiences of preservice foreign language teachers during field placements and student teaching suggests the complexity of taking partial or full responsibility for teaching another person's classes. Preservice teachers enter their mentors' classrooms with ideas of what should take place in the language classroom; however, there is no guarantee that the mentors or the students in the classroom will share those beliefs.

Studies by Antonek, McCormick, and Donato (1997) and Kwo (1996) suggest that preservice or novice teachers have a concern for establishing a positive, professional relationships with their students. Kwo noted that the inexperienced teacher in her study emphasized the importance of relationships with her students and her peers. For an action research project, she chose to focus on questioning and soliciting answers from her reticent students. Kwo noted that her choice of topic reflected her concern with establishing rapport with her students. In their analysis of two student teachers' portfolios, Antonek et al. (1997) found that, despite the efforts of foreign language teacher educators to ground students in second language acquisition theory, the student

teachers did not mention the theories in the portfolio matrices, but "focused instead on interpersonal relationships and effectiveness of activities" (p. 24).

Given the inexperience of the teachers in Antonek et al. (1997) and Kwo (1996), it might be expected that the teachers would focus initially on their rapport with students rather than connections to the theory of their course work. As Weber and Mitchell (1996) suggested in their research with 60 student teachers, it is perhaps unreasonable to expect preservice teachers to be able to reflect on more than basic survival skills in their initial field experiences.

Weber and Mitchell (1996) characterized student teachers as belonging to a "subculture." In their view, student teachers do not belong to the culture of experienced teachers because of their limited teaching experience and their student roles. While they tried to adapt to the expectations of others, they also tried to assert their own professional identity. At times, they were disillusioned by unmet expectations of their mentor teachers. Johnson's (1996) case study of a student teacher in a secondary ESL placement seems to echo these findings. Maja, Johnson's student teacher, found a significant gap between her vision of good teaching and the realities of the classroom. She found the instructional activities of her mentor teachers to be meaningless or too challenging for the students.

Previous formal and informal language learning experiences of preservice teachers may also have an impact on their receptivity to the content of methods courses and experiences field experiences. Johnson (1994) noted that the four preservice teachers in her study seemed to accept or reject content from the teacher preparation program based on their prior experiences in formal and informal language learning settings. While the

preservice teachers sometimes criticized their formal language learning experiences and rejected those models of language teaching, they noted that their informal language learning experiences gave them an understanding of the situational use of language. In their images of themselves as teachers, the participants hoped to be teachers who motivated students, used authentic materials, and fostered language acquisition.

The teachers in studies by Freeman (1991, 1993) and Gutierrez Almarza (1996) described similarly negative experiences in formal language learning and positive experiences in informal language learning. Language in the school classroom was a subject, with a focus on the linguistic system. Language outside the classroom involved "personal experience" and "interpersonal communication" (Gutierrez Almarza, 1996, p. 57).

Summary of Research

Taking into consideration the findings of studies on foreign language teacher education programs and preservice teachers, it seems that investigations of the impact of teacher education programs must consider the prior experiences of language teachers in addition to their developing understandings of language teaching in methods courses and field experiences. While foreign language teacher educators may make an effort to provide opportunities in methods courses and in field placements for preservice teachers to connect theories of language learning with practices in the classroom, the previous experiences of preservice teachers with language learning and teaching may influence their receptivity to those opportunities.

In their initial field placements and student teaching, preservice foreign language teachers may initially focus on developing positive, professional relationships with their

students and their mentor teachers. While methods courses and prior experiences may have an impact on preservice teachers' understandings of language teaching and learning, preservice teachers may struggle to implement their understandings of how to teach while striving to maintain a harmonious relationship with the students and mentors in their field placements.

Methodology

Qualitative case studies provide one means of understanding the lived experiences of a particular group of people. A case study design seemed appropriate for this study because it allowed me "to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved" in the teacher education program (Merriam, 1998, p. 19). Because the interest of case study research is "in the process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation" (p. 19), I focused on growth of the preservice teachers' theoretical and practical knowledge in the teacher education program. Given the lack of research on foreign language pedagogical content knowledge and on graduate-level foreign language teacher education programs, this research sought not to confirm hypotheses, but rather to explore the phenomenon of learning to teach foreign languages.

Participants

The preservice foreign language teachers who participated in this study were enrolled full-time in the four-quarter M.Ed. program at The Ohio State University during the 1998-99 school year. The preservice teachers completed methods courses on the teaching of foreign languages in secondary and in elementary schools. For their secondary school field experience, the students were placed with mentor teachers with

whom they worked all year. They spent five hours per week in the school for the first two quarters of the program. During the last quarter of the program, they taught full-time in their secondary field placement. During winter quarter, they spent six hours a week teaching and observing in elementary schools, including an immersion school.

The participants in the study had majored or minored in either French, German, or Spanish. None had previous experience teaching his or her language, other than tutoring. The six students were representative of the M.Ed. cohort in terms of their experience in the target culture, family background, gender, undergraduate institution, and field placement location. They are identified in citations as Frank, Heather, Laura, Margy, Rachael and Susan. References to their foreign languages have been eliminated to protect their anonymity.

As Patton (1990) noted, qualitative research typically focuses in-depth on relatively small samples that are chosen purposefully because they represent "information-rich" cases (p. 169). I chose to use maximum variation sampling in order to gain greater heterogeneity within the case participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). In order to gain insight into the understandings of the experiences of the preservice teachers, I made use of ethnographic techniques including observations of participants, interviews with participants, and analyses of written documents throughout the year-long program.

As an observer in the preservice teachers' methods classes, I kept notes of class events and the preservice teachers' responses to these events. In addition, I observed the

research participants four times during their elementary school field experiences and once a week during their ten weeks of full-time teaching. Post-observation conferences were held following each observation.

The participants were invited to share their experiences in the program through three individual and two group interviews. Individual interviews were held during each of the three quarters of the program; group interviews took place at the end of the Winter and Spring Quarters. Although I used an interview guide for each session, the guides indicated potential topics and questions while remaining open for the preservice teachers to elaborate on their understandings of language teaching gained in their methods courses and field experiences. Because my research focused on the connections the preservice teachers made between theory and practice, structured interviews would have been inappropriate for this study. I was exploring the preservice teachers' expressed knowledge and beliefs, not testing hypotheses about their knowledge and beliefs (Kvale, 1996, p. 127).

Written documents that were collected included reaction papers that the participants wrote in response to readings for their methods courses. In lieu of a final master's exam, the preservice teachers created a portfolio during the last two quarters of the program. The project required them to reflect on videotaped lessons, to compose a position paper on a topic in foreign language education, and to conduct a small action research project. These final portfolio projects were also analyzed.

The constant comparative method was used to analyze the data, with the primary objective of finding patterns in the data (Merriam, 1998). Although my analysis was ultimately thematic in nature, the unique aspects of each participant's experiences were

considered as well during analysis. While Wing's (1993) definition of pedagogical content knowledge provided a conceptual framework for considering the knowledge that the preservice language teachers gained during their teacher preparation program, the data analysis focused on searching for patterns in the preservice teachers' understandings of how to teach a particular groups of learners. The notion of pedagogical content knowledge provided a framework for considering the connections that the participants made between the theoretical bases of teaching and learning foreign languages and their practical applications in the classroom. The codes and categories, however, emerged from the data analysis.

Findings

Knowing how to teach a foreign language and how to teach it to a particular group of students were the most frequently discussed aspects of the participants' pedagogical content knowledge. Some of the sources of that knowledge included methods course work, field experiences, and experiences as language learners. The participants described the ideal foreign language teacher as one who communicated in the target language as much as possible, who used instructional materials designed for native speakers, who established meaningful contexts for language use and who provided both structured and open-ended activities for language practice. These characteristics corresponded with the participants' understanding that students learn a language by being immersed in it and by using it for real communication.

During the year-long M.Ed. program, the participants taught their second language in three different contexts, two elementary and one secondary. Although their experiences were shaped by different groups of students and at least three different mentors, they

shared some insights on the impact of context on learning and teaching foreign languages.

In their field placements, the participants had the opportunity to experience the teaching and learning of foreign languages from the point of view of the teacher. They reported that sometimes it was challenging to teach as they believed they should when the classroom environment did not meet their expectations. As inexperienced teachers, they sought to develop positive relationships with their students, which sometimes affected how they chose to teach. They also reported that the age of students seemed to play a role in their receptivity to language learning. In contrast, the participants infrequently discussed the influence of community factors on the teaching and learning of foreign languages.

Use of the Target Language

The participants discussed the need for foreign language teachers to use the target language consistently in the classroom. Although the native language, English, could be used for some clarifications and explanations, the target language should be used, as Frank suggested, "as often and in as many different situations as possible." The participants contended that if the foreign language teacher code-switched frequently from the target language to the native language, students would stop trying to understand. Margy noted, "Once you switch [and] keep switching, then there's no reason to stay in it. They're just going to assume that you're going to switch back."

Some of the participants seemed to have difficulty, however, in putting their theoretical commitment to using the target language into practice. When faced with a group of students that was less motivated about learning the language or that was less

accustomed to hearing the language, the participants noted that they used more of the native language. Frank explained, "Too often, I believe that we do not teach in the target language because we are afraid that students need to understand everything that is said and that they will subsequently become frustrated and 'tune out.'"

Use of Authentic Materials

Incorporating materials that were created for native speakers of the target language was another key ingredient in teaching foreign languages identified by the participants. They defined authentic materials as media that originated in the target countries and were intended for native speakers of the language. Cartoons, artwork, novels, poems, audio and video cassettes, newspapers, magazines, realia and music were suggested as sources of authentic material.

Authentic materials provided students with an opportunity to see language used in context and to observe daily culture. Laura described her use of authentic weather reports that she pulled from the Internet. She noted, "They hear, 'Oh yeah, in Europe they use Celsius' but then when they see it, they're like, 'Ooh! They really do!'" Without visual and/or auditory resources, the participants stated that their students would not truly understand cultural and linguistic practices.

Contextualization of Language Use

The participants stated that the foreign language teacher was responsible for contextualizing the teaching of grammatical structures or vocabulary in ways that were meaningful and interesting to students. Contextualization involved the selection of a particular situation or text that would demonstrate the use of an aspect of language, whether it was a verb tense or a particular set of vocabulary.

For example, Frank chose to use a fairy tale to illustrate the use of two past tenses in his target language. After students had analyzed the use of the tenses in an actual fairy tale, they wrote an original fairy tale to show their mastery of the usage of the tenses. He commented, "I felt that combining the tenses in a 'fairy tale' format would be the most natural way for the students to experiment and understand the functions of both."

In addition to providing a context and activating students' background knowledge, teachers needed to personalize the context so that students could talk about their experiences, their feelings, and their ideas. Engaging their students in talking or writing about everything from their preference in sports to their belief in extraterrestrials, the participants strove to provide their students with opportunities to express themselves.

Skill-Getting and Skill-Using

In describing how teachers should structure daily and weekly lessons, the participants discussed the use of skill-getting and skill-using activities. Skill-getting activities allowed students to practice structures in a controlled way in preparation for more open-ended communication. For example, Susan described how she moved her students from simply understanding the meaning of prepositions of place to creating descriptions of the locations of people and buildings based on pictures or maps.

In their field placements, the participants reported that if they did not provide sufficient practice activities, they were unable to reach their ultimate goal of skill-using. Frank commented on the need to plan more skill-getting practice before asking students to use the language to communicate more complex needs. He said, "I have a tendency to model something and then to say, 'Okay, now it's your turn.' Creativity involves time. In my excitement to get to the final product I think that I skip necessary steps."

Students' Expectations of the Foreign Language Class

During the three quarters of their field placements, the participants reflected on the similarities and differences between their ideas about teaching and learning foreign languages and the students' understandings of what was expected in the foreign language classroom. The expectations of students in a given foreign language class regarding the use of the target language, authentic materials, contextualized activities or skill-getting and skill-using activities limited or enabled the participants to teach according to their theoretical and practical understandings.

While the participants stated that teacher should use the target language as the language of instruction in the classroom, some participants reported that their mentor teachers did not use the language consistently. Thus, students expected that language teachers would provide directions or explanations in English exclusively or would translate from the target language to the native language. Susan commented, "If you know that every sentence will be translated immediately into English, why would you even bother listening to the first sentence in [the target language]?"

At times the participants reported success in using the target language; at other times they reported their frustrations. Heather commented that when she used the language, her students did as well. She said, "When I use [the target language], they tend to use [it] or try to. Or if they don't know how to say it, they ask and they repeat it." However, in describing her initial teaching experiences, Margy noted that her students did not understand enough for her to maintain language use. She said, "I didn't feel confident to continue in [the language], nor did I think they would comprehend me, so I switched

right back to English. Which I'm not proud of, but I really didn't have much of a choice."

Most of the participants reported less confidence and success in trying activities to which the students were not accustomed. For example, Laura noted the challenge of introducing a skill-using, communicative activity with a class that was "not used to communicative activities." On the other hand, the same students did well on discrete-point grammar items on a test "because [the mentor teacher has] always stressed that as being really important."

The Role of Intern

Despite the strength of their convictions about how they should teach, the participants described how their inexperience in teaching foreign languages and their lack of familiarity with their placement students sometimes limited how they chose to teach. Rachael noted that she was too anxious in the first days of student teaching to think about contextualizing the teaching of specific grammar points. She said, "It's not that I'd forgotten it. It's just that in the beginning of things, you're just not worried about all that stuff. You're worried about having to get up in front of the kids and say all the right things and do all the right things."

The participants described their efforts to provide exciting lessons during their initial teaching experiences in order that the students would accept them and appreciate them. They focused on establishing a positive, yet professional, relationship with students. In their first contact with students, the participants were concerned to provide lessons that would engage students but not represent a drastic departure from the students' expectations of the foreign language class.

The Impact of Students' Age

In contrasting their experiences teaching foreign languages to elementary and secondary school students, the participants discussed the difference in student responsiveness. The participants reported that their elementary school students, even those who had no background in the foreign language, were open to taking risks with the language. Margy commented, "I found the elementary much more willing to try. Their affective filter is down. They're excited to learn."

High school students, on the other hand, were described by some of the participants as being more critical and self-conscious. Heather noted that high school students were "a little bit more quick to judge" the teacher and to complain about target language use. She commented, "They'll say [...] 'We don't speak [the target language]. Could you please speak English?'" Furthermore, Laura suggested that older students "do not always like to admit that they enjoy something. It could be the case that no matter what activity I devise, they will lethargically or unwillingly set to work on it." Frank noted that with quieter students, he tended "to take it personally" that they did not want to speak.

In their field placements, the participants interacted with students who responded differently to their expectations for participation and to the requirements of the foreign language class. The students' responses affected their enthusiasm and energy in working with the groups.

The Community Setting and the Foreign Language Program

The participants in this study were chosen partially on the basis of their secondary field placement. Three were in suburban schools and three were in urban schools. However, the participants did not frequently discuss the impact of community settings on

language programs. Only two of the participants indicated that the community setting affected the language program in an important way. Frank noted that in his suburban setting, parents' concerns for student success created pressure for teachers. Susan described her urban setting as placing less value on the learning of foreign languages and school learning in general.

The other participants described the essential similarity of the challenges of working with secondary school students, regardless of the community context. Rachael noted, "I think you see a lot of the same problems no matter where you are. Rural, suburban, urban, whatever." The majority of the participants appeared to agree with her.

The Contribution of Methods Courses

The participants described the methods courses as providing valuable information on how to teach foreign languages. They stated that they gained ideas for teaching from the demonstrations of methods instructors, guest speakers, and their peers. Readings and lectures provided the theoretical basis for these practices. At the beginning of the teacher education program, the participants indicated their initial surprise at the complexity of the teaching task. Laura commented, "I can't help but feel silly when I think back to a year ago when I was writing my statement of purpose for this program. I wrote why I wanted to become a teacher, all the while not realizing how little I know about the profession!"

Learning to write lesson plans was cited by the participants as one of the most important skills they gained. By writing lesson plans, the participants noted that they understood better how to move from structured practice or skill-getting to open-ended practice or skill-using. Susan commented that the methods instructor gave them "points

to check, like 'Is this going from skill-getting to skill-using?' That type of thing is helpful because after it's drilled into your head so many times, you check automatically."

In writing their lesson plans, the participants described their evolving understanding of how to contextualize the content. By the end of the first quarter, creating a context for teaching specific grammar points or vocabulary had become automatic. Rachael noted, "I've been *taught* to do contextualized activities; I've been *taught* to get kids up and involved and I've been *taught* to do a lot of partner work and I've been *taught* to do all these different things."

The Contribution of Field Experiences

Observing and teaching in different classrooms provided the interns both with ideas for teaching the foreign language and with experience in trying received ideas. Mentors in the field showed the participants models of language teaching that the participants described wanting to emulate or to avoid. After trying teaching techniques or recommendations, the participants noted that some techniques were successful, while others were less successful.

The participants' experience in trying to use the target language as the language of instruction met with some success and some disappointment. The participants noted that when they were in an immersion setting, they used the language as it was modeled. In their secondary placements, however, the participants reported a more uneven use of the target language. Susan described the differences between classes in which the teacher used the target language consistently or code-switched between the target language and English. She noted that more target language use made a difference in students' achievement. She said, "I know that's really beneficial. I mean, I've seen it. Just that

two different level I classes could be so different. I'm sure it's because of the target language use."

The participants described being convinced of the value of using authentic materials, after witnessing students' response to these materials. Heather described how her elementary school students reacted to a calendar from the target culture, which outlined saints' days. She said, "The children's eyes light up when they are given some sort of authentic materials.... They all wanted to know which days were their saint days and noticed the differences in that calendar from the one they use in their own school."

Several of the participants discussed their observation or experimentation with the contextualization of language practice in their classrooms. Margy noted that contextualization became a focus for her because her mentor did not contextualize language instruction. She noted that she had "a difficult time switching the classroom routine" but that, in the end, her experiences "proved that instruction needs to be contextualized. When students can relate to the information or see it in a real context, they are more likely to retain it."

While observing and experimenting in their field placements, the participants seemed to gain information regarding the impact of classroom contexts on foreign language teaching. They described how the classroom context shaped how they chose to teach. The expectations and receptivity of their students determined the possibilities and limitations on what they chose to do as interns.

Most of the participants who commented on student expectations considered them to be limiting. For example, Margy described the challenge of trying to change students' expectations for the foreign language class. Sometimes students were receptive and

sometimes they were resistant to her efforts to change the routine. She described how when she tried to use the target language, to which the students were not accustomed, her students gave a negative affective response: "The minute I started speaking in [the target language], [the affective filter] just went right up. I just lost them."

In addition, the role of intern limited the participants' authority in the classroom. Frank seemed to sum up the participants' understanding of their position in commenting, "It really is not my class. That changes everything for me. To a certain degree . . . I have to follow my teacher's lead. And again, that doesn't mean I can't try anything new or that I haven't." As interns, however, the participants noted limitations based on the classroom context.

The Contribution of Formal and Informal Language Learning

The participants identified both positive and negative experiences in their formal and informal language learning. Their experiences seemed to sensitize them to certain aspects of teaching language. As a group, they described their appreciation of classroom teachers and learning opportunities that had required the use of the target language, offered access to authentic materials, and provided a real or realistic context for language use.

Use of the language for meaningful communication was a valued experience. Frank commented that when he traveled abroad and was immersed in the language for a month, "That's when I got hooked with [the language]. I thought, 'Oh, you know, I can actually use this for something." Use of authentic materials was motivational as well. Susan commented, "From personal experience, I know that it is much easier to learn (and feel like you are making progress), when you have authentic shows to watch or music to listen

to." Margy discussed the facilitation of her learning through contextualization. She said, "When I was able to connect the material to something else in my life or to see the information in an authentic context, I retained it and enjoyed the learning process. On the other hand, when the material was taught in a factual sense with no meaning attached I was not stimulated to learn."

In regards to their understanding of classroom contexts of language learning, several of the participants emphasized the differences between the context in which they learned their foreign language and the contexts in which they were placed during the M.Ed. program. They seemed surprised by the lack of motivation and interest of their field placement students in comparison to themselves as students. Thus, their own experiences as language learners did not seem to prepare them for the impact of student expectations and response on their teaching. Laura commented, "I assumed before I started this program that all students in [language] classes were just like the experience I had -- we all loved it! But this is not the case at all. Even if they like the subject, they don't like to show it or admit it."

Implications

The findings of this study suggest implications for the preparation and continued professional development of beginning foreign language teachers. Because this study focused on six preservice teachers in one teacher preparation program, the findings and resulting implications represent tentative conclusions. Nevertheless, the findings corroborate some of the previous research on foreign and second language teacher education, while also exploring the impact of one program's efforts at teacher education reform.

The first implication of the study relates to the preservice teachers' understandings of the theory and practice of foreign language teaching and learning. It seems that their knowledge was somewhat congruent with current thought in the field. The participants outlined the need for teachers to provide a language-rich environment in which students are guided to use the foreign language to express their own meanings and to gain information from others and from authentic texts. On the other hand, the participants' discussions of language teaching and learning also revealed their position as novice teachers. Although they reflected on various theories of teaching and learning, they appeared to be most concerned about the immediate task of planning and implementing instruction in specific elementary and secondary classrooms. They sought to create lessons that would engage their learners. Given their status as preservice teachers and as interns, this focus is not surprising. It seems, however, how their lack of experience had a somewhat limiting effect on their efforts to implement the theories and practices to which they indicated being committed.

While the participants acquired and used the language of the profession to discuss language teaching and learning in an abstract way, they seemed less capable of relating their understandings to the reality of their field placements. Activities, materials, or teaching techniques were evaluated on the basis of students' response to them. If students were responsive, the participants described feeling successful. If students were not responsive, the participants were less likely to continue trying to implement their knowledge. While the participants demonstrated some understandings of the current theory and practice of teaching and learning languages, they seemed to struggle to

reconcile what they saw and did in the field with what they supposedly knew from their course work.

Teacher educators must recognize the developing and fragile nature of preservice teachers' understandings of how to teach. Learning to teach does not begin and end in a one-year, intensive teacher education program. Preservice teachers are just beginning to understand the processes of teaching and learning foreign languages during the preparation program. Thus, language teacher educators need to consider how they will support the continuing knowledge growth of the graduates of their teacher preparation programs.

It is unrealistic to expect that a one-year program may provide more than a base of understanding of the theory and practice of teaching and learning languages. Because beginning teachers have different levels of knowledge and skill, they require continued support and education into the first year of teaching (Zimpher & Howey, 1992). In reforming teacher preparation programs, colleges of education have recognized the need to partner with school districts in order to ensure a coherent preservice program. If professional development schools or networks are serving in a collaborative role, it is a natural extension for them to provide support for entry-year teachers. Although their involvement would be less intensive, colleges of education could support regional and local professional development centers and projects that focus on the continued development of content-specific pedagogical content knowledge. The continuing education of beginning teachers would not necessarily involve the traditional university courses or workshops. A coherent series of professional dialogues on the teaching and learning of languages might even take the form of on-line discussions.

The second implication of this study relates to the contribution of formal and informal language learning experiences to the participants' developing foreign language pedagogical content knowledge. Second language teacher education researchers, including Gutierrez Almarza (1996) and Johnson (1994), have suggested that teachers' previous experiences as learners in both informal and formal language contexts affect their understandings of teaching and learning languages. Experiences as language learners may affect receptivity to the content of methods courses or to experiences in their field placements.

The findings of this study suggest that the participants' experiences as language learners had some impact on their understandings of teaching and learning languages. The participants' experiences as students appeared to sensitize them to specific issues. For example, Margy frequently discussed contextualized language teaching because she recognized the difference it made in her ability and motivation to learn. Previous experiences as learners contributed to the participants' developing pedagogical content knowledge by making salient particular theories or practices.

Given the impact of the participants' experiences as language learners, teacher educators should consider building reflection on language learning experiences into their teacher preparation. By asking preservice teachers to reflect on their experiences and to identify their resulting beliefs, teacher educators may begin to help their students deconstruct their current understandings of teaching and learning languages. Horowitz (1985) and Hadley (1993) offer two possible instruments for use at various points during the teacher preparation program to promote discussion of beliefs about language learning and teaching. Preservice teachers may benefit more, however, from multiple

opportunities to reflect on their experiences and to compare and contrast them with the theory and practice they receive in their teacher preparation programs. The use of journals, personal narratives, and reflection papers are some possible means for increasing preservice teachers' awareness of the impact of their own learning experiences.

The third implication of this study concerns the role of methods courses in the development of foreign language pedagogical content knowledge. According to the participants, the methods course work provided them with an introduction to the theory and practice of teaching and learning foreign languages. Despite their years as language students, the participants indicated a lack of awareness prior to entering the program of what was involved in language learning and teaching. Although they identified language learning experiences that became more salient during their methods course work, they described the methods courses as an orientation to current thought in language teaching and learning. Like the teachers in Freeman (1991, 1993), they gained a professional discourse that enabled them to talk about current theories and practical teaching ideas. In effect, they gained both propositional and practical knowledge in their methods courses.

These findings suggest that university course work shapes preservice teachers' understandings of their chosen field. By providing an introduction to both the theoretical frameworks of the field of foreign language teaching and learning as well as practical information on implementing the theory, methods courses may have a major impact on preservice teachers (Grosse, 1993; Mitchell & Redmond, 1991; Widdowson, 1984; Wilburn, 1990). As Grossman (1989) suggested, it appears that the participants received at least part of their foreign language pedagogical content knowledge through their

methods courses. Through assignments like lesson plan writing and peer teaching and through demonstrations by methods instructors and guest speakers, the participants gained practical ideas of how to implement the theory discussed in their readings and lectures.

Although this study considers only one example of a foreign language teacher education program, it suggests the potential for university course work to support the development of preservice teachers' understandings of the theory and practice of foreign language education. Rather than assuming that preservice teachers gain sufficient practical knowledge through internships, university faculty need to be prepared to serve not only as transmitters of propositional, theoretical knowledge of teaching and learning but also as models of current practice in teaching and learning. No matter how gifted individual mentor teachers might be, preservice teachers profit from seeing multiple role models. As Wideen et al. (1998) note, conceptually coherent programs may have positive effects on preservice teachers' beliefs. Year-long, intensive programs that provide a consistent theoretical foundation and concomitant practical application may have a positive impact on preservice teachers' understandings of the teaching and learning of languages.

The final implication of this study relates to the impact of field experiences on preservice teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. The six preservice teachers in this study frequently discussed how to teach in their particular field placements. As interns, the participants wanted to please their mentors and be successful with their students (Weber & Mitchell, 1996). Despite stated commitments to particular theories or practices, the participants might abandon them if they perceived a negative reaction.

Thus, the participants tended to place the control over the success or failure of particular lessons on the students and the mentors in their placements. Depending on the expectations or the age of the students, the participants described the teaching task as relatively easy or difficult. Mentor teachers contributed to student expectations and attitudes by the classroom routines they had established prior to the interns' arrival.

The focus of the preservice language teachers on issues with their particular students and mentors implies that teacher educators need to consider to a greater extent the impact of internship placements on the preservice teachers' knowledge. The participants appeared to evaluate theories or practices by trying to observe or implement them in their field placements. Given that the preservice teachers in this program were in their secondary field placements for the duration of the school year, it is not surprising that they reflected on the propositional and practical knowledge gained in methods courses as it related to the classrooms in which they were observing and teaching. They identified conflicts between the idealized perspective presented in methods courses and the contextual constraints encountered in their field placements.

Many researchers have argued the importance of selecting mentor teachers who have the expertise to serve as collaborators in preservice teacher education. In order for preservice teachers to benefit from year-long internships, they must be placed with mentors who are committed to current understandings of how to teach language. Although this study did not investigate the mentor teachers' understandings of language teaching and learning, the importance of a collaborative effort between well-informed teachers and university faculty seems integral to the success of reform efforts (Holmes Group, 1986, 1990; National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, 1996).

Teacher educators in a given preparation program, however, might address some of the challenges of specific classroom contexts by incorporating case study in methods courses. Problems may be introduced by the interns themselves or by means of videotaped lessons. Ways of responding to a given situation could be brainstormed and role-played by the preservice teachers, under the guidance of an experienced language teacher or methods instructor. For example, peers and teacher educators could respond to interns' immediate concerns for maintaining language use. Suggestions of strategies could assist interns in ameliorating specific classroom situations. The gap between the idealized goals of the language classroom and the contextual constraints perceived by the interns could be addressed in specific, realistic ways that would empower interns to make minor, but important, changes in their contexts or their perceptions of their contexts.

In summary, the task of preparing teachers for foreign language classrooms is a complex responsibility. Teacher educators should recognize the value of exploring the experiences of the language students who enter their teacher education programs after completing an undergraduate program in a foreign language. Experiences as language learners sensitize preservice teachers to certain theories and practices of language teaching and learning. Through methods courses, teacher educators have an opportunity to ground preservice teachers in the theory and practice of foreign language education. They must recognize, however, that while preservice teachers need authentic classroom experiences, field placements seldom represent idealized language learning situations. Students and mentors have expectations for the foreign language class that novice teachers cannot completely change. In order to function successfully in their internships, preservice foreign language teachers may compromise some of their theoretical and

practical understandings of language teaching. Although they may leave the university teacher preparation program with a base of foreign language pedagogical content knowledge, preservice foreign language teachers need continued support in order to deepen their understandings of how to teach specific groups of learners.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative case study research has offered tentative findings on the experiences of six preservice foreign language teachers in a one-year, graduate-level teacher education program. By exploring the participants' foreign language pedagogical content knowledge and some of the sources of that knowledge, this study sought to investigate their theoretical and practical understandings of foreign language education. Because of the lack of extensive study of preservice foreign language teacher education, the study was exploratory in nature. The findings from this consideration of language teacher preparation suggest additional areas for potential exploration.

Given that this study focuses on the experiences of preservice teachers in only one preparation program, similar questions about the development of theoretical and practical knowledge of preservice teachers in other programs should be considered. Comparative studies that explore the differences in the knowledge growth of undergraduate and graduate students or that compare year-long programs and more extended or part-time programs should be conducted. Studies that explore the knowledge growth of preservice and inservice teachers enrolled in graduate-level programs may also provide a telling comparison in terms of pedagogical content knowledge. The impact of years of experience on the knowledge growth of language teachers should be investigated.

This study focused on the K-12 teacher preparation of six preservice teachers. Although the participants reflected on their understandings and experiences with younger children, the majority of the findings focus on teaching languages to secondary school students. A separate study that focuses on the theoretical and practical knowledge gained in preparing to teach elementary school children would provide information to teacher educators seeking to improve the preservice and inservice training of elementary school foreign language teachers, who are increasingly in demand in the United States.

The findings of this study regarding the preservice teachers' willingness to implement certain theories or practices in specific field placements suggests the need for extended study on the impact of classroom context on teacher decision-making. Although the participants indicated certain commitments in language learning and teaching, the response of their students to their efforts in the classroom appeared to affect their subsequent commitment to implement particular theories or practices with specific groups of students. Future studies should explore the impact of students on how foreign language teachers teach. Researchers should consider the impact of different school contexts as well as different levels of student proficiency, interest, and previous achievement in the foreign language.

In addition to investigating the impact of classroom context on preservice teachers' commitment to specific theories or practices, researchers should focus on the status of preservice teachers as novices during field experiences. Being an intern was described by the participants as a subordinate role. They noted that their decision-making was limited to some extent by their lack of familiarity with the students and by the expectations of their students and mentor teachers. The role of the intern should be considered in greater

depth, as it appears to affect how preservice teachers choose to teach. Follow-up studies of how initial field experiences affect the entry year teaching should be conducted.

The present study limited its focus to the knowledge of six preservice teachers in a teacher education program. It did not explore the goals or beliefs of foreign language teacher educators, field supervisors, or mentor teachers. Future studies should focus on the perspectives of each of these participants in order to provide a more comprehensive program evaluation. In this way, language teacher educators might determine the coherence of the preparation that preservice teachers receive in a particular program.

Finally, this study was limited to an exploration of the preservice preparation year. Longitudinal studies of the preservice and entry years would provide additional information on the development of teachers' understandings of the theory and practice of foreign language education. If content-specific entry-year programs are in place, researchers should consider the content and scope of these programs and their perceived impact on novice teachers' transition into full-time teaching.

Over the course of their one-year teacher preparation program, the six participants in this study gained theoretical and practical knowledge of the teaching and learning of foreign languages. They explored their experiences as language learners and approached their initial teaching experiences on the basis of the information gained in methods courses. They gained foreign language pedagogical content knowledge from their experiences as language learners, methods students, and interns and developed a level of understanding of certain aspects of language teaching. Nevertheless, their knowledge growth was limited by the length of the program, their opportunities in their field

placements, and their inexperience as teachers. Foreign language teacher educators and researchers must continue to refine the teacher preparation process by focusing on the development of teacher knowledge, from the first day of the preservice program through the entry year and beyond.

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